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INFO RUEAHLG/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHDC  
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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000788

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SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, EEB/CBA, G/TIP  
COMMERCE FOR COBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ETRD](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: TIP, VISAS TOP LIST OF NEW OMANI CHAMBER OF  
COMMERCE CHAIRMAN'S CONCERNS

¶1. (U) On August 15, the Ambassador discussed with incoming Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Chairman Khalil bin Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Khunji. Khunji immediately raised his concern that the USG's Tier 3 ranking of Oman in the latest Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report would adversely impact the country's ability to promote trade and investment. He noted that trafficking "happens in the originating countries, not here in Oman, through the actions of recruitment agencies and travel agents." The Chairman stated that since all expatriate employees have contracts with Omani employers, those who feel they are being trafficked have legal recourse to the Omani judicial system.

¶2. (U) Khunji said that the OCCI has been working with its membership to promote labor awareness. For example, he remarked that several OCCI members participated in an International Labor Organization-sponsored workshop in July and that government officials have attended labor conferences with exporting countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Furthermore, Khunji questioned the sources of the data used in arriving at the ranking, noting that mere conjecture should not serve as its basis.

¶3. (U) Khunji also expressed his concern over the efficiency of the visa application process, noting that "we're not sure how long it will actually take." Khunji found that uncertainty over the timing adversely impacts business, especially for those who need to go quickly to conclude deals. In addition, the Chairman noted his uneasiness with having to pass through U.S. Immigration, relaying that one board member had to wait 5 hours in Newark before being processed, while the daughter of the Vice Chairman had to wait 9 hours in secondary inspection upon arrival in California. The Ambassador requested the names and dates of the travelers in order to follow-up with the Department of Homeland Security.

¶4. (U) The Ambassador raised the registration status of the Muscat American Business Council (MABC), which was supposed to have been legalized under an arrangement negotiated with the previous Chairman. Khunji did not object in principle to registering the organization under the title "Omani American Business Council" and asked the Ambassador to provide a formal request along with a listing of its membership.

¶5. (SBU) Biographic note. Khunji was appointed as Chairman of OCCI via Royal Decree on July 1, 2007. Khunji is well-connected. In addition to his role as chairman of the Al-Khunji Group of Companies, Khunji serves on the boards of al-Jazeera Tubes Company, Oman National Electric Company, Oman Wastewater Services Company, and the Omani Center for

Investment Promotion and Export Development (OCIPED). He also holds board positions on the Omani Businessman's Council and the Muscat Municipality Council. Since September 2005, he has served as the Honorary Consul to Belarus.

GRAPPO